

NEWSLETTER

FOR BIRDWATCHERS

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Mistaken Identity

Several letters have come in including those from Mrs. Inga Willis, V. Santharam, Dr. Miss. Hamida Saiduzzafar, and Lavkumar Khacher questioning the identity of the bird on the cover of our 1980 Newsletter. According to them it is not a Pied Bushchat but a male Magpie Robin. A close look confirms that this is indeed the case and the Editor apologizes for the mistake and suggests that he be replaced by someone more competent.

Zafar Futehally

A Note on Bird Migration in Madras by V. Santharam

Just as I was thinking of collecting some data on migratory birds visiting Madras, especially at Adyar Estuary, I got a letter from my friend Shri L. Namassivayam of Calicut, asking me to send him a list of migratory birds of Madras together with dates of arrivals and departures. At the same time, 'Madras Naturalists' Society' asked its members to do some projects and I agreed to do one on migration of birds in Madras with special reference to Adyar Estuary.

I thought that keeping records on dates of arrivals and departures would be a very easy task until I went to the practical side of it. I had no binoculars and had to rely on the one I used to borrow occasionally from the Late President of Madras Naturalists' Society Shri G.K. Bhatt. The rest of the birdwatching had to be done with naked eyes (unless I had somebody with binoculars with me) and this proved to be very tiresome especially in the identification of shore birds, gulls, terns etc. But I got my own binoculars, a 10 x 50 by February end and thereafter I was able to maintain better records. Then came the question of 'Field Guides'. Though all the 10 volumes of the "Handbook" and Whistler's 'Popular Handbook' were available at the local libraries, most of the plates and a good number of pages were missing. Moreover it was difficult to get the right book at the right time. So I consulted some of my birdwatcher companions who suggested the fine book "Hamlyn Guide to Birds of Britain & Europe" by Bertel Bruun and illustrated by Arthur Singer. Almost all the species are illustrated in colour (opposite to the details) and this includes flight patterns, seasonal variations in colouration, male, female differences etc. and is therefore very valuable in the field. This book proved to be helpful in identification of birds like waders, gulls, terns, wagtails, warblers, raptors etc. Indian birdwatchers would be very much benefited if such a book on our birds were to be brought out.

Identification involves consultation with all the bird books and other bird literature. After a lot of trouble, one gives the bird a name only to be proved, in another few seconds, that the legs of the bird observed ought to have been yellowish instead of olive green, and the whole process is commenced afresh. Above all a college student like myself, who has

been trapped under the semester system can do very little or even no justice to birdwatching and field expeditions in the peak months (both of migration and examinations) of November, December and April - May. As a result the records maintained are not very accurate, yet I am providing such information I could gather during the period.

Sandpipers

On 23rd July, I saw the first common sandpipers (Tringa hypoleucos) at Adyar Estuary. There were a couple of them, flying with their usual notes, low over the water. I saw them throughout the winter and the last birds were observed on 29th April and I could see no sandpipers when I visited the place after about a week. In the middle of May, I saw a flock of 8-10 sandpipers flying over the water but I am not sure whether they are common sandpipers or some other species. Plenty of spotted or wood sandpipers (Tringa glareola) were seen on our outing to Velachery swamps on 30-10-78 and we saw plenty of them at Manali Jheel on 13.4.79. According to my friends who visited the place on 13-5-79, there were no birds on that day. I have also seen the Marsh (Tringa stagnatilis) and Terek or Avocet (Tringa terek) sandpipers at Adyar and Green (Tringa ochropus) at Manali, though I have no records for the first and third. The date of arrival of terek sandpiper is not known though they were seen last on 21st May. Probably their migration was delayed due to the cyclone which hit the eastern coast in mid-May. I am also including the Curlew Sandpiper (Calidris testaceus) which does not belong to the typical sandpiper 'genus' here. Only one record of the bird which was sighted on 1.3.79 is available. The bird in the winter plumage was moving about in the company of stints from which it was difficult to distinguish but for the slightly larger size. On a careful study the slightly downward curved bill and white rump were visible.

I saw the first redshanks (Tringa totanus) on 3-10-78. There were a couple of them feeding on the marshy field which gets inundated when the tide comes in as it is connected with the river by a canal. These birds concentrate more on the southern banks of Adyar which is the campus of the theosophical Society and its world head quarters. A single bird, feeding on the open tidal mudflats of the estuary on 21.5.79 was the last bird to be seen. On 28th I saw a couple of Redshanks in flight though I am not certain whether they were redshanks or greenshanks. I failed to record the date of arrival of greenshanks (Tringa nebularia) at the estuary and noticed their presence only in February. They were last seen on 15th April and I failed to notice them on 28th April, when I made my next trip to the Society campus, where they were usually seen.

Phalarope

On 30.10.78, at the Velachery swamps we noticed a small wader in the shallow waters, along the road which could have either been swimming or walking. We identified it as the red necked phalarope (Phalaropus lobatus). The bird seemed to tolerate our presence and even allowed our friend to approach it within ten feet and photograph it. Unfortunately we could not visit the place again and collect more information on this bird which was probably a passage migrant.

Plovers

A small flock of little ringed plovers (Charadrius dubius) was encountered on 13.8.78 at the estuary. They were very commonly seen throughout the season and the last birds were seen on 20.4.79. The Kentish plover (Charadrius alexandrinus) was first seen on 5.9.78 and though not as common as the abovementioned plover and not regularly seen, this bird must have been present at the estuary throughout the period. The last bird was seen on 7.5.79 as it moved on the dried-up marsh, hunting for small insects.

On 5.4.79, I saw a bird slightly larger than the little ringed plover but almost similar in appearance alighting on the open meadow of the Adyar estuary. It bobbed its head as it watched me suspiciously and after a while flew off. As it took off, I noticed a white wing-bar, though it was not very prominent. In the "Handbook", I came across the reference made in connection with Eastern ringed plover (C. hiaticula tundras) which is said to be a rare straggler or very rare winter visitor. It has been recorded from Gilgit, Sultanpur, Maldives islands and there are two authentic sight records from Karachi and Jaffna peninsula (Ceylon). I think due to the large size and the positive presence of the white wing bar it could be this bird, though I regret not having recorded any other features especially the facial pattern which is also a good pointer in distinguishing it from the little ringed plover.

Golden plovers (Pluvialis dominica) were seen from 20.8.78 at Adyar especially in the evenings when they returned to the marshes prior to roosting. They were seen almost regularly throughout the period, though some of the birds were only passage visitors. A flock consisting of 14-16 birds were the last I saw of them on 29th April. Though they could have arrived along with the golden plovers, the grey plovers (Pluvialis squatarola) were first seen on 9.9.78. They were occasionally seen throughout the winter and the last date of their sighting was on 18.4.79.

There is no doubt that the large sand plovers (C. leschenaultii) are only passage migrants at the estuary. I had seen them for about a week from 2.9.78 when the southward journey was on and were again encountered on 18.4.79 and this time they stayed a bit longer as the last glimpse I had of them was on 21.5.79.

Stints & Sanderling:

Perhaps the most abundant winter visitors to Adyar are the stints. The numbers were highest when passage birds joined the regular winter birds in the peak months of migration. Flocks of over a couple of hundred birds were a common sight during these periods and it was a memorable sight to see the flocks in air, flying in unison. The little stints (Calidris minutus) were the predominant species and the first birds in their worn-out breeding plumage landed in the estuary by 5.9.78 and when the last birds left the shores of Adyar, on 29.4.79 and another two birds (probably stragglers) on 21.5.79, most of the birds had acquired their breeding plumage. Though I have seen it only once, I am sure that Temminck's stint (Calidris temminckii) is also a winter visitor to the estuary. Because of its close resemblance to the little stint, it has been difficult to distinguish the two species.

I have also seen a single Sanderling (Calidris albus) as it was feeding along with stints on the marshes on 9.9.78, I have never been able to locate it again and I feel it keeps more to the seashore, which I had not visited.

Snipe, Whimbrel & Godwit

Though snipes (Capella spp.) can be seen at Adyar especially from Theosophic Society grounds, on passage I was not able to visit the place and record the dates in autumn. But we saw one or two birds on our Velachery trip on 30th October. Later on I saw them at Adyar on 10th and 17th March. Again on 13th April on our visit to Manali jheels we saw four or five birds. But on our visit to the Society campus on 15th April, we could see no birds at all.

Whimbrels (Numenius phaeopus) made their appearance at Adyar by 2nd September and were present till 15th October. They again were seen from 20th February till 29th of April. A single bird was again spotted in flight on 6.6.79, which was probably one of those birds which stayed back in the winter quarters.

We saw one or two blacktailed godwits (Limosa limosa) at Adyar, among whimbrels on 23.9.78. We could not spot them later. But a number of these birds were seen in the vicinity of Vedanthangal tank in the 1st week of January.

Stilt & Avocet

Black winged stilts (Himantopus himantopus) are locally migratory birds and come to Adyar in the winter. The first birds were sighted on 2.9.78. Soon they became a part of the estuary. Congregations of about 200 stilts

were a common sight especially in the evenings before roosting. In March-April the numbers went up further and the last birds were observed on 28.4.79. I must also mention that my friends had seen about a dozen birds at Manali Jheel on 13.5.79 and also about our sighting of these birds at Poondi Reservoir, in the last week of June in 1978, which is about 40 kms. northwest of Madras. Manali Jheel is located to the north of Madras City.

A pleasant surprise awaited me at Adyar on 31-12-78, as I walked along the shores of the river which had exposed mud flats, wet and squelchy. There were 4 avocets (Recurvirostra avosetta) feeding on the marshy soil. After some time they were resting on one leg and bobbing their heads. Next day I saw 2-3 birds. After that I did not see them and thought that they had visited Adyar only to take shelter from the cyclone that passed Madras a week before. Having given up the hope of seeing these rare birds, I was surprised to see them back at the estuary on 25.3.79. There were 8 birds and they were roosting along with the stilts in the backwaters. I noticed them regularly afterwards. I saw them on 29.5.79. On 28th May, I had seen about 18-20 birds and on 29th only one bird was seen, flying northward. (Dr. Salim Ali records that the last date of Avocet (migratory race) seen in India to be 24th May).

Gulls and Terns

The first gull was noticed on 9.10.78. But as it was too far, I could not identify it. But on 22nd October, there were plenty of blackheaded (Larus ridibundus) and brownheaded (Larus brunnicephalus) gulls. Both species were commonly seen at the estuary as well as the sea-coast throughout the period and the last birds were seen on 20.4.79, though 3 blackheaded gulls were seen on 16.5.79 and another gull (species not known) was seen on 21.5.79.

Gulbilled tern (Onychoprion nilotica) is the most common tern at Adyar in winter. Though I saw a single bird on 8.7.78, the main stream of migrants arrived by 9th September. I have been noticing them till 19.6.79. On 6.6.79, I saw about 200 of them along with other species. On 19th I saw only 3 or 4. The other species which occur here are caspian tern (Hydroprogne caspia) and little tern (Sterna allifrons) which were last seen on 6.6.79. The dates of arrivals of these birds are unknown. In the rainy season (November-December) I saw more species of terns, which I could not identify.

Flamingo & Frigate Bird

On 17th November, we saw 3 flamingoes (Phoenicopterus roseus) at Adyar estuary. They were flying at a low height of about 35-40 feet from the ground level, directly above our heads. They were flying from the river and heading in a northward direction. Again on 9th December, we encountered 8 birds, heading southwards. But when they reached the river, they

changed the course and went up the river.

Armed with the information that a frigate bird (probably a female magnificent frigate bird (Fregata magnificens)) was at large over Madras City, Shri. Koneri Rao having seen it near the port on 25th September, we kept our eyes open to see if we could locate it again. The bird had been described to be about the size of Pariah Kite with a "swallow" tail and black under-parts with a white patch on the breast. Shri Rao had seen the bird in the company of pariah kites which constantly harassed the intruder. On 11th of October, we had the great luck in observing the bird as it glided northward over the estuary. Though it was a very brief encounter, the memory of it is still fresh in our minds.

Wagtails

The white wagtail (Motacilla alba dhukensis) was the first amongst the wagtails to arrive at the estuary. The day was 3rd October. It was also the first to leave on 25.2.79. A subspecies of this wagtail, the masked wagtail (Motacilla alba personata) which is considered to be uncommon in this area was seen on 5.12.78. Only a single bird was present.

The yellow wagtails (Motacilla flava) arrived by last week of October at Adyar and Velachery along with grey wagtails (Motacilla caspica). At Adyar, I have noticed greyheaded (M.f. thunbergi) blueheaded (M.f. beema) and blackheaded (M.f. melanogrisea) all subspecies of yellow wagtail. The greyheaded was last seen on 13.4.79 at Manali, the blueheaded last on 22.4.79 at Adyar and the blackheaded was seen on 20th February and 1st March in full breeding plumage. Of these, the "Handbook" mentions that the blueheaded wagtail occurs "south to Andhra and Kerala". The black-headed is said to be common winter visitor "south of Sind, Northern Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and a vagrant recorded from Sri Lanka". Besides, I have seen another subspecies of the yellow wagtail which had olive-greenish? head and back, whitish supercelium and darkish ear coverts. I wonder if this could be the greenheaded wagtail (M.f. taivana) which has been recorded as a rare vagrant from Howrah and Western Bhutan. This bird was seen at A dyar along with other yellow wagtails on 11th and 25th March and on 5th, 7th and 9th April. The grey wagtail was last seen on 9.4.79.

I was not able to record the forest wagtail (Motacilla indica) on its way to the south. But I was able to see it on its northward journey. I first saw it on 28.2.79 at a grove in Manali. Then I saw it at the campus of Theosophical Society on 15th and 28th April.

Kestrel & Harrier

The Kestrel (Falco tinnunculus) arrived at the estuary by 16.11.78. It was a female and was seen throughout the winter. Usually it was perched on a stone or even on the ground when it was approached, flew a few yards and again settled on the ground. This bird was last seen on 9.4.79.

A juvenile pale harrier (Circus macrourus) was seen at Adyar occasionally. It was first seen on 3.10.78 and later on 16th December. We saw another bird at Guindy Deer Park on 24th February. But we do not know if it was pale harrier or some other species.

Warblers & Flycatcher

The Blyth's reed warbler (Acrocephalus dumetorum) was first heard on 29.10.78 on the bougainvilleae bush opposite to my house. For the first few days it was scarcely heard. But afterwards it became very vocal and was heard often. Again, a few days prior to its departure, it became silent. I said 'good-bye' to the warbler on 3rd May, when at dusk it uttered its roosting calls at about 6.40 p.m.

The greenish warbler (Phylloscopus spp.) was heard on 14.10.78 at the Theosophical Society campus and the brown flycatcher (Muscicapa latirostris) was also seen at the same place on the same day. But I have not been able to record the date of departure of both these birds.

Swallow, Shrike, Drongos and Pitta

The common swallows (Hirundo rustica) arrived the city a month earlier than the usual date. The first swallows were seen on 11.8.78. Soon they were seen in very large numbers, flying about, hawking insects and perched on wires. The last birds were observed on 15.4.79.

A brown shrike (Lanius cristatus) was seen on a thorn bush on 23rd September. It was again seen on 15th and 20th October. I have not been able to see them on their return journey.

On our 3.2.79 outing to Theosophical Society we identified the bronzed drongo (Dicrurus aeneus). This bird is much smaller than the common black drongo (D. adsimilis). It also had less forked tail and a flycatcher like bill as described by Dr. Salim Ali in the 'Handbook'. The distribution of this bird according to Whistler is: "along the outer Himalayas, near the eastern border of the Central provinces, and in southwest India". It is said that these birds spread in winter season from their breeding grounds. This bird was last seen on 17.3.79. I feel that this bird could be a winter visitor to Madras, especially the Theosophical Society campus which, with its lush-green vegetation reminds one of Kerala, where I have seen this bird earlier. Another drongo, about the size of the black drongo with greyish underparts was seen at Manali grove on 18.11.78 and again in December. Though I am not very sure, I think it could be the Ashy Drongo (D. leucophaeus).

On the very day, we saw the bronzed drongo, we saw another new bird at the society campus. It was Indian Pitta (Pitta brachyura) moving about on the ground under a thick canopy of bushes and creepers. We saw it till 17.3.79. We could not see it when the next trip was made on 15.4.79.

Stone Curlew

We saw 3 stone curlews (Burhinus oedicnemus) on one of the islets of Adyar estuary from the campus of the society on 28.4.79. We did not see it later and we do not know whether the bird is a migrant or resident. My friend had seen this bird last year around the same date.

Insect Control by Birds (Continued from December NLBW Vol.XIX No.12) by Indra Kumar Sharma

Green bee-eaters, house swifts and swallows consume flying insects in the air over growing crops. Bulbuls and house sparrows hunt insects on plants, and mynas, shrikes, drongos and partridges hunt insects and their larvae on the ground. Drongos of course also catch insects in the air.

When the soil is ploughed, grubs, maggots, and cocoons of pest insects are exposed and various species of birds feed on them. Some birds follow the tractor and pounce on the insects when they emerge. Among such birds are egrets, house crows, jungle crows, and mynas. The hoopoe and the Indian roller feed on insects and their larvae from the ground.

It would therefore be desirable to attract different species of birds to agricultural fields for pest control. This should be done by planting bushes of Zizyphus and Capparis and other suitable varieties. Ficus trees too may be useful for attracting mynas and bulbuls. Crevices in the walls of the farm houses attract birds like mynas for breeding.

It has been noted that occasionally there were serious epidemics of Amsata and Athalia on mangoes and mustard crops and the crops were completely destroyed by these pests. However the damage was negligible where there were large numbers of insectivorous birds.

Birding at Vemulapalli Tank by S. Ashok Kumar

While cruising along Nalgonda-Miryalguda road around 10 a.m. on 19th December last year, a vast expanse of water - it's ripples washing the foot of a hillock suddenly came into view. Parking my Car on the roadside, I made my way to the water-front through the fallow fields equipped with Zenith Binoculars and Dr. Salim Ali's "Book of Indian Birds". Near the margin of the tank I spotted 7 whitebreasted waterhens. Some distance away on the projection of a submerged rock there were 6 cormorants and 3 little egrets. One cormorant was drying its wings in typical manner for almost 10 minutes. After a while I saw a creature crawling on to a rock and I saw that it was a tortoise and later I found two more tortoises in the company of the cormorants. The elongated and raised heads of the tortoises looked very much like the head of a cobra. 50 yards away from the rock I found three more tortoises surfacing and their brown backs reflected the bright rays of the sun. In this area I found 14 cormorants.

On the other side of the tank I noticed flocks of teals clucking in a peculiar manner and flying from one area of the tank to another. Their flight presented a magnificent picture. Close to the water front there was a party of little ringed plovers running and stopping as they are wont to do to pick tit bits in the grass. I watched this scene for nearly three hours.

A week later I went to the same spot and found hundreds of teals in flight presenting again a very spectacular picture against the background of a turquoise blue sky.

Birds getting scarce by Amanta Mitra

I have been keeping a watch on the depleting bird population of birds around Calcutta and I would like to make some comment on a few species.

1. White collared green kingfisher (Halcyon chloris): On the west of the city on the banks of the ganges is the Indian Botanical Garden founded in 1782. Its area is 273 acres and consists of a magnificent variety of trees. There are a number of swampy areas covered with aquatic vegetation.

On 17-4-76 Shri. P.K. Sen Gupta and myself saw these white collared green kingfishers in this garden. In West Bengal this bird has been recorded from the Sundarbans as well as in the Botanical Garden. It was my first encounter with the bird and it drew my attention to itself by its sharp call - Chrink, Chrink, Chrink Krinchu, Krinchu, Krinchu..... We were able to locate three birds. 2 of them were obviously a pair and were carrying food for their nestlings in a nest hole about 30 feet from the ground in the trunk of an old casuarina tree. 2 weeks later on 1.5.76 we revisited the site. The nesting period was over and we discovered only one bird in a bushy tree on the bank of the swamp. Next year again on 25.6.77 we spotted the bird in the same patch of garden.

We have not been able to see this bird from 1977 to 79 and perhaps the birds have become locally extinct.

2. Forest Wagtail (Motacilla indica): In spite of the accelerating denudation in Calcutta there are some big orchards at Khodar Bazar about 30 km. to the south of the city. In a lichi grove (Nephelium litchi) we came across a forest wagtail on 16.10.76. Since forest wagtails are not commonly seen in south Bengal we were quite fascinated with this discovery. The sideways movement of the tail clearly revealed that identity. Next year on 12.3.77 we once again came upon the bird in the neighbouring area of Bishayluxmi Tola. It was a solitary bird eating insects from the ground. Thereafter up to 1979 our search for this species in the same locality has proved futile.

3. Burmese Plaintive Cuckoo (Cacomantis merulinus querulus): In the salt lake area east of Calcutta covering a space of 80 sq.km. 246 species of

birds have been recorded. The reclamation operations have commenced and the salt lake region will cease to be the delightful habitat for birds which it has been for a long time. Several years ago in company with P.K. Sen Gupta I had located 6 cuckoos near Dhelua village. A small black eye-streak and chestnut underparts confirm its identity. On 30-4-67 again both of us sighted another solitary bird about 3 km. to the east of the previous location. Since that time we have not been able to trace this bird anywhere during our repeated excursions in this area.

There are several other birds which have also disappeared with the destruction of the habitat, and among these are the Haircrested Drongo, Blacknaped Oriole, Laggar Falcon, and Chestnutheaded Bee-eater. If the administration recognizes the importance of preserving these birds this could still be done by establishing suitable nature reserves in selected localities.

Correspondence

Birdwatching in Egypt by Sudhir Vyas

Birdwatching in Egypt is in full swing and I get a fair amount of time to devote to my hobby. One problem is a paucity of books. I have discovered Meinertzhagen's "Nicoll's Birds of Egypt" in two sumptuous volumes in a local library - but it dates from 1930, and is, I think, a trifle outdated. But with the help of this (its a tremendous help nevertheless), and "The Field Guide to the Birds of Britain and Europe with those of North Africa and the Middle East" by Heninzel, Fitter and Parslow, and a few papers (in Arabic) published locally. I'm doing well enough. But I have to completely change my birdwatching style - birdwatching in the desert is a different matter altogether! I'm still learning.

And I'm amazed at how rich Egypt is in Birds of Prey, especially Falcons.

Mynas by Dr. Abdul Mooed

The myna work (See NLBW Vol.XIX December 79) is progressing slowly as both Allan and I have other commitments besides mynas. However, preliminary analysis of external measurements show a significant geographical variation in India. The Bangalore birds are perhaps the biggest. I shall write again when I know more about it.

I have examined the 200 odd gizzards that I have brought with me from seven localities in India for analysis of foods eaten. Bangalore sample contained more insects (closely followed by Trivandrum) than seeds and fruit. Other samples seem to have more seeds and fruit. Although the feeding data is from only one sample at each locality it may be invaluable to explain the differences among localities especially size and shape differences of the bill.

Loranthus and Lorikeets by Priya Davidar

I read with interest Mr. Sugathan's article (Vol.XX No.1, January 1980) on loranthus and the lorikeets. Lorikeets are known to be fond of nectar and berries, and play an important role in pollinating some of our less specialised birdflowers. I have once seen a lorikeet drink (or try to) nectar from the flowers of Dendrophthoe falcata, a common species of loranthus with long tubular flowers. The bird slit every flower down to its base to get the nectar, many flowers were thus damaged.

The name of the loranthus species visited by the lorikeets would have facilitated interpretation, as Macrosolen parasiticus a common species in the Western Ghats complex, is dispersed more often by less specialised frugivorous birds like the bulbul, barbet (and possibly the lorikeet), than by the flowerpecker. The larger size of the fruit in certain populations apparently restricts the flowerpeckers visit.

Floods in Ranganathittu by H.N. Mathur

Neginhal's article on 'Floods in Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary (Vol.XX No.1, January'80 page 8) made interesting reading. The reaction "Build your nests at a higher level" is typical of a P.W.D./Irrigation Engineer and for that matter of a large number of people. Is he the one to be blamed? What have we done to educate him and his type? Have we tried to inculcate in him a love for the birds? Have we invited him to have a close look and get a feel for the birds and an understanding of the ecosystem, so forth, and so on?

It would be desirable to look at the whole thing from the angle of reservoir management: how best the 'Operation' release be phased out and over what period. We could think of fixing lower reservoir levels when the water release could be started, keeping in view the need for water storage in the reservoir so as to ensure its efficient functioning. This would mean an interaction between the Sanctuary Management and Dam Management to understand each others problems and limitations.

Comments by Lavkumar Khacher

In one of the earlier issues you had reproduced my account of the pair of Laggar Falcons having accepted the crows nest we placed on a balcony of Hingolgadh fort. The latest news is that the birds have indeed settled down there. We have not sent anyone up to investigate whether they have eggs or young, not wanting to disturb them.

I am drawing the notice of Shri M.A. Rashid, Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife Wing) to Sumanbhai Shah's note on the mini-Bharatpur off the Vadsar road. Perhaps he will agree to doing something about the place.

On 8th February, coming back from Jasdan we saw an incredible collection of Demoiselle Cranes on the Aji Reservoir south of Rajkot. At a conservative estimate, more than 5,000 cranes were settled along the water's edge. What a thrilling sight they made as they flew against the orange glow of the setting sun? This winter they are more scattered as the heavy monsoon rains have filled all the reservoirs providing them innumerable roosting and drinking places. Even so, they are so plentiful that we often have them flying over the city at night and every one looks up to see the skims flighting low across and dark sky, their underparts lighted up phantom-wise by the glow of the city lights.

Behaviour of Birds at Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary during Eclipse by ZF

Dr. Gift Siromoney, Head of the Department of Statistics, Madras Christian College, Tambaram, Madras, reports that he went to Vedanthangal Bird Sanctuary to observe the reaction of the birds during the eclipse. During the peak period 89% of the sun's disc was covered at Madras. Vedanthangal is 80 km by road from Madras in a south westerly direction. Dr. Siromoney reports that "There was no change in behaviour of birds either in feeding, roosting, nest-building or other activities". This contradicts the findings of observers who were present in areas of total eclipse. In such areas there was apparently considerable roosting activity when there was darkness at noon.

Our Contributors

Shri. V. Santharam, c/o. Shri. N.V. Ghat, 12-A, Leith Castle South Street, Madras 600 028.

Mr. Indra Kumar Sharma, Bhagawati Bhavan, Ratanada Road, Jodhpur 342020.

Mr. S. Ashok Kumar, IAS, Joint Collector, No.10-3-283/5, Humayun Nagar, Hyderabad 500 028.

Mr. Ananta Mitra, Advocate, 6/1, Prince Anwar Shah Road, Calcutta 700 033.

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